

2017

Patient Care: The Forefront of Pharmacy Practice

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Recommended Citation

Richart, Dakota L. (2017) "Patient Care: The Forefront of Pharmacy Practice," *Purdue Journal of Service-Learning and International Engagement*. Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5703/1288284316520>

Available at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/pjsl/vol4/iss1/2>

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PATIENT CARE:

The Forefront of Pharmacy Practice

Dakota L. Richart, *College of Pharmacy*

ABSTRACT

For the past three years, Richart has been a member of APhA–ASP and has actively participated in numerous events. She planned, organized, and executed health fairs, educational presentations, and other direct patient care experiences alongside other members. An interaction as simple as a five-minute discussion with a patient about their blood pressure, antihypertensive medications, and lifestyle modifications can help save their life. Each patient interaction has impacted her by strengthening her communication skills, developing her professionalism, and providing confidence as she applies her knowledge with patients. Whether APhA–ASP’s events focus on a small audience at a local health fair or serve Hoosiers from all parts of the state, the organization’s initiatives make a positive impact and improve patient care.

KEYWORDS

pharmacy, patient care, service, operation, diabetes

INTRODUCTION

Access to appropriate health care is a challenge in today’s society. Patients often feel discouraged when waiting weeks to see a doctor, leaving a hospital with unanswered questions, or struggling to pay for a new medication. My goal as a future health care professional is to serve the public. The Purdue University College of Pharmacy provides countless opportunities to assist people in the community. Aside from the required didactic coursework and experiential education, many students are involved with professional organizations that provide valuable opportunities for patient interaction.

The global mission of the American Pharmacists Association—Academy of Student Pharmacists (APhA–ASP, n.d.a) is “to be the collective voice of student pharmacists, to provide opportunities for professional growth, to improve patient care, and to envision and advance the future of pharmacy.” With the help of community

partners, faculty advisors, and many devoted students, Purdue University’s APhA–ASP chapter has fulfilled this mission by providing services to many people across the state of Indiana. My role as the patient care vice president of Purdue’s chapter has provided me the opportunity to grow as a professional while serving those around me.

DESCRIPTION

Over the past three years, I have been involved in more than 100 patient care events ranging from small-scale educational presentations to large-scale community health fairs. Although many of the events are similar in nature, each one has provided a new learning experience. One of the largest initiatives this year was the creation and implementation of the Operation Diabetes statewide outreach program.

According to the American Diabetes Association (n.d.a), nearly 700,000 Hoosiers have diabetes, and roughly

25% of those people are undiagnosed, greatly increasing their risk for serious complications. In addition, approximately 1.7 million Hoosiers are considered prediabetic, meaning their blood sugar levels are elevated, but they are not yet displaying the symptoms required for a diagnosis of diabetes. Because of the prevalence of diabetes in Indiana, it is evident that Hoosiers could benefit from additional access to health care. Members of APhA–ASP participated in the Operation Diabetes statewide outreach program, and they were given the opportunity to organize an event in their hometown, at a local pharmacy, or at another public place such as a local church, doctor’s office, or the mall. APhA–ASP members created patient-friendly, educational material focusing on prevention, management, and long-term complications associated with diabetes. At some events, free point-of-care glucose tests and analyses were offered. A pharmacist was present to assist students in providing services and individualized patient education. To date, APhA–ASP has reached out to 62 of the 92 counties in Indiana. Events were held in 26% of Indiana counties with a plan to provide this initiative to all counties by the end of 2018.

Smaller events can also make a large impact on patient care. For example, APhA–ASP members offer free blood glucose, cholesterol, and blood pressure screenings once a month at Custom Plus Pharmacy, a local, independently owned pharmacy in West Lafayette. We also provide education and services related to mental illness in collaboration with the College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP). The expansion of services has provided more experience to students, and patients look forward to APhA–ASP members’ attendance every month. The pharmacy staff appreciates the provision of additional patient care services.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

In less than a year, APhA–ASP organized 32 events in addition to two longitudinal projects, Operation Diabetes

Table 1. Detailed breakdown of how many patients APhA–ASP members served based on the types of events offered.

| Event Type | Patients Reached |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Operation Diabetes | 320 |
| Operation Immunization | 457 |
| Generation Rx | 240 |
| OTC Medication Safety | 256 |
| General Health Fairs | 503 |
| General Education Events | 332 |
| Total | 2,108 |

and Operation Immunization; members provided care to over 2,000 people around the state of Indiana (see Table 1). One such event students enjoy year after year is participating in health screenings at the Lafayette Urban Ministries homeless shelter, serving those who would otherwise not receive care. Additionally, APhA–ASP educates elementary students in the Lafayette area through the Generation Rx and Over-the-Counter Medication Safety programs. The goal of Generation Rx is to help prevent the misuse and abuse of prescription medications; the purpose of Over-the-Counter Medication Safety is to educate children on safe use of easily accessible medications. Through these programs, APhA–ASP impacts the community through the provision of education.

Pharmacy students become immunization-certified during pharmacy school, but aside from the one-day certification class, there are no requirements for students to practice individual immunization skills. Recently, APhA–ASP implemented Operation Immunization in collaboration with Custom Plus Pharmacy, where members traveled to 29 local businesses and immunized employees. A chapter-wide survey at the end of the semester revealed that student members felt they benefitted from these events and wanted to participate in future events.

This year, APhA–ASP was featured as the “Club of the Week” at Purdue University’s farmer’s market, where students educated fellow students, staff, and other community members about the variety of services their local pharmacist can offer.



Figure 1. Students, Abbey and Lindsey, educate members of the community about the variety of services that pharmacists can provide. APhA–ASP was featured as the “Club of the Week” at the Purdue University Farmer’s Market.

STUDENT IMPACT

One benefit of joining this organization is the opportunity to participate in hands-on learning activities and strengthen communication skills through activities like point-of-care testing. Although some of these interactions with patients last less than five minutes, they provide



Figure 2. Dakota Richart performs glucose and HbA1c testing on a patient at Catholic Charities of Indianapolis in November 2016.

substantial opportunities for skill development. Students review drug class and disease state knowledge, network with local health care professionals, and improve communication techniques. Patient interactions promote confidence, a sense of pride, and feelings of accomplishment. It is rewarding when I successfully apply what I learned in the classroom to a real-life situation.

Some APhA–ASP events also provide a welcome break from the rigorous coursework required in pharmacy school. This year, APhA–ASP members were invited to assist a local elementary school in hosting Family Fitness Night. Members led elementary students through obstacle courses, physical fitness activities, and a variety of organized games. While not all of APhA–ASP’s events focus on students’ academic knowledge, the

opportunities offer hands-on experiences, direct patient interactions, and opportunities to reflect and grow. For each member, the level and type of involvement varies; regardless, the experiences gained from involvement in APhA–ASP provides benefits to all students.

CONCLUSION

APhA–ASP has been an established professional organization at Purdue University for over 40 years. Although I have only been involved for three years, the evolution of the organization is apparent. Many events focus on mutually benefitting pharmacy students and community members, which is important because students are able to learn and grow within their discipline while serving the community. With the help of hundreds of pharmacy students, the chapter advisors, and many community partners, members of APhA–ASP have successfully increased public access to health care. The future of APhA–ASP at Purdue is bright, and it will continue to benefit both students and the community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To my writing mentor, Dr. Kimberly S. Plake.

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AUTHOR BIO SKETCH

Dakota L. Richart hails from Seymour, Indiana. She is a fourth-year Doctor of Pharmacy student at Purdue University. She has had many experiences with patient care activities as a member of American Pharmacists Association–Academy of Student Pharmacists (APhA–ASP). These experiences have played a crucial role in shaping her as a future health care provider. Richart plans to pursue a postgraduate residency training program, with a focus on patient care.

Richart, D. L. (2017). Patient care: The forefront of pharmacy practice. *Purdue Journal of Service-Learning and Engagement*, 4, 4–6. <https://doi.org/10.5703/1288284316520>